

Learning Environments

Reflection Bank

Use these ideas to incorporate reflection into your daily program structure. Reflection activities can be used throughout your program to create a positive social and emotional learning environment.

Why This Matters

- Reflection activities provide an important time for youth to develop awareness of their emotions and practice expressing those emotions.
- Reflection activities allow youth to think intentionally about their learning experiences.
- Youth responses during reflection opportunities provide crucial feedback to staff about the effectiveness of program activities and insights into youths' personal development.

Getting Started

- Pick an activity based on the amount of time you have. This is a bank to get you started. Use your own creativity to add to this bank.
- Modify questions to fit your activity or project.
- Each person has a preferred reflection style (group discussions, writing, creative expression, etc.). Be intentional about varying the types of reflection activities to help youth learn what works best for them.
- Provide lots of time for youth to think before you ask them to answer out loud for the group. Some youth need more time to process questions than others, and others will jump to an answer quickly without actually doing much reflection.
- If everyone is going to be asked to share out loud with the group, name that expectation at the beginning. Allow youth to share “popcorn” style rather than a fixed order to give everyone the time they need to prepare a response.

How To Use It

- 1) Pick an activity or question that is relevant for your program activity, age of youth, and amount of time.
- 2) At the end of a particular activity or at the end of the day, devote time to the reflection activity or question. Practice validating youth feelings and thank participants for sharing.

Take It Further

- Try using the same reflection activity for an extended period of time. Consider tracking how youth are doing. (See **Emoji Reflection** as an example.)
- Many of the reflection activities and questions could also work well as a check-in activity before program begins.
- For more ideas, visit [*Building your program quality 20 minutes at a time*](#) from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development.

Tool: Reflection Bank

If you have a couple minutes...

- **Color check-in:** Have youth pick a color that describes how they are feeling. Ask each youth to explain why they chose that color and what it represents to them.
- **One word:** Ask youth to describe how they are feeling in one word. Youth could also name one adjective to describe their day.
- **Facial Expression Chart:** Print pictures of different facial expressions (e.g., happy, bored, excited, angry). Have youth pick an expression that describes how they are feeling.
- **Group Process Reflection:** Have youth go around and share how they would finish the following sentences.
 - As a group, we are strongest when...
 - As a group, we are weakest when...

If you have 5 to 10 minutes...

- **Roses and Thorns:** Ask youth to reflect on the highs and lows of their day. Have each youth think about the following questions: what was the high point of your day (your rose)? How did you feel at that point? What was the low point of your day (your thorn)? How did you feel at that point? Allow each youth to share their roses and thorns.
- **Weather Report:** Ask youth to relate how they feel right at the moment, using only weather words; sunny, stormy, partly cloudy, etc. Have youth share their weather word and explain why they might be feeling that way.
- **Pride, Praise, Progress:** Ask youth to think about their day and share one thing they are proud of (Pride), one thing they are working on (Progress), and one thing someone else did well (Praise).
- **String Toss:** Have youth stand in a circle. Ask a reflective question (e.g., who is someone in the group that you learned something cool about today? What is one thing you learned today?). Hold the end of the ball of string. Hand the ball to the first person to answer the question. That person holds on to the string and then tosses the ball to the next person to answer the

question. When everyone has answered, note how interconnected everyone is, that everyone's learning impacts everyone else.

- **Team Reflection:** After a group activity, reflect on the group process with the following questions: What was it like working with a team? What things are easier to do with a team? What things are harder to do with a team? At what point in the day did you feel most connected to others? At what point did you feel the most disconnected from others?

If you have 15 minutes or more...

- **This is How it Happened:** Have youth work in small groups to create a short skit that portrays what they experienced in the preceding activity. Allow 10 to 15 minutes of planning time and 5 minutes for each group to perform.
- **Be the Leader:** In small groups, invite youth to recreate the experience they just had for a group of younger kids. Each group should identify a learning goal, a learning activity, and a plan for assessing if the participants learned about the goal. Have groups share their activity plans with the whole group. Allow 30 minutes for this. If youth are actually going to implement these plans, give them additional time to revise their plans and add lesson components like a time management plan or needed resources.
- **Individual Reflection:** Have youth spend some individual time writing down their responses to the questions below. Have each youth share at least one of their answers with the group.
 - Which one of your SEL skills helped you most today? How so?
 - What do you think is your most valuable contribution to the project?
 - What did you learn about yourself today?
 - How would describe your attitude today? How did your attitude affect how you felt?

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- **Ways of Being Debrief:** Have youth reflect about their Ways of Being. Pick at least one question from each of the Ways of Being for youth to think about (4 questions in total). After 5-10 minutes of journaling time, have youth share one of their answers.
 - Ways of Feeling: How were you brave today? How did you express your feelings today?
 - Ways of Relating: How were you kind to others today? How did you get along with others today? How were you a good friend today?
 - Ways of Doing: How did you work hard today? How did you succeed today? How did you fail today?
 - Ways I Am: How did you have a positive attitude today? How did you learn about yourself today?